

Milena Katsarska. *Parapositions: Prefacing American Literature in Bulgarian Translation 1948–1998*. Plovdiv University Press, 2021. 319. ISBN: 978-619-202-669-1

Milena Katsarska's thought-provoking book focuses on the paratexts of works of American literature, published in Bulgarian translation within a timeframe approximately coinciding with the Cold War period. As the author states in her introduction, this is not a book "strictly... 'about' prefaces/afterwords fixed in their genre attributes and definition," but rather an ingress into "the unfolding *practice of prefacing* in which a plethora of *actors* participate, are involved, or implicated" (9). Following Gérard Genette, Katsarska approaches the paratexts under discussion as spaces with a critical potential providing significant insights into the development of the academic discipline of American Studies in Bulgaria and shedding light on the shifting perspectives of the reception of American literature by the general reading public. She discusses their social significance while also stimulating her readers to ponder on major historically conditioned issues, such as race, ideology, and power, in both American and Bulgarian contexts (242). As a result, her book is not merely a study of the prefatorial reception of translated American texts within a particular time frame. Rather, it is an implosive, multi-dimensional space, which illuminates the tensions of a context in which the authority of Bulgarian academics in shaping Bulgarian readers' perceptions of American "otherness" was challenged by external public figures such as translators, editors, and journalists.

Entitled "A Preface to Forewords and Afterwords: Between Gossip and Book Fact," the book's first chapter outlines the institutional history of American Studies in Bulgaria, tracing its development chronologically from the introduction of the first academic course in American literature in 1938 (15). It also offers some theoretical considerations on paratexts and explicates Katsarska's understanding of the prefaces' "critical potential" as occupying a "para-position" to the domain of literary history.

Chapter Two, "Between Two Bibliographies," introduces two bibliographical data collections, compiled by Katsarska specifically for the present research and published for the first time as appendices. These are "Institutional American Literature and Culture Studies in Bulgaria 1930–2000: An Ascending Bibliography by Decades" and "An Ascending Bibliography of Prefaces/Afterwords to American Literature in Bulgarian Translation Arranged by Years 1858–2010." Far from being mere compilations of data, the appendices are among the book's indisputable academic assets. In her analysis of the data Katsarska singles out three particular "nodes" "of quantitative concentration in institutional academic preoccupations with American literature/culture studies throughout the twentieth century" (52): American drama and theatre, "race" (Black American writers), and Edgar Allan Poe (52–54).

The next chapter, "Between the Prefatorially Framed Editions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," employs the paratextual data of Bulgarian editions of Harriet Beecher-Stowe's book as a case study of the "ideological function" of prefatorial discourse that "generat[es] fixed and durable frames of reference to the discussion of 'race' in the context of Bulgaria" (10).

The discussion of race continues in Chapter Four, "Race Matters: Between the Covers of a Book." For Katsarska, race has been an especially prominent and productive issue in American studies scholarship, alongside with class and gender, and is, therefore, "'naturally' registered in ... prefaces/afterwards – but with distinctive local nuances" (117). Prefaces to the poetry of Langston Hughes (1962) and an Anthology of Black American Poetry focused on the ideological nuances in the presentation of the authors' lives and works (for instance, the importance of Langston Hughes' visit to the USSR).

A significant merit of Katsarska's work is that she avoids the stereotypical portrayal of the ideological antagonism between east and west during the Cold War era. This is evident in the book's closing chapters. In Chapter Five, "Questions of Literary History: Between Paratexts," the author discusses *Americans about America*, the first voluminous compilation of American prose translated and presented to Bulgarian readers in 1952. Since it was published shortly after the establishment of communist rule in

the country, the selection of American writers and texts was intended to match the new politico-ideological context. The same went for the prefatorial content that accompanied the texts.

The last chapter, “The ‘Un-American’ Activities of Viktor Sharenkov: Between Biography and History,” is dedicated to the life and work of Viktor Sharenkov (1892 – 1963), a Bulgarian scholar, who earned his PhD from Columbia University, and played a key role in the introduction and institutionalization of American Studies in Bulgaria. Interestingly, the book starts with what we may call a *story of creation*, the story of the founding of the Bulgarian Association of American Studies and the institutionalization of American Studies in Bulgaria, and ends with a *historical paradox*: the history of Sharenkov, one of the “founding fathers” of this institutionalization, who was deported from USA for “un-American” activities.

The word “between,” which features in the titles of the book’s six chapters, discloses Katsarska’s authorial intent to stylistically *position* her text *between* the prefatorial *paras-* of rigid academic research, on the one hand, and livelier, public-oriented discourse, on the other. And her book does that brilliantly.

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